

Bach Festival of Charleston Interview

First Scots is sponsoring the second biennial *Bach Festival of Charleston* to be held in the sanctuary from March 4th through March 6th. The Sentinel has interviewed Dr. JeeYoon Choi, the Festival's Artistic Director; Ricard Bordas, who will conduct the Festival Chamber Orchestra's and Kirk Choir's performance of two Bach Cantatas on March 6th; and Professor Stefan Engels, the guest organist for the March 5th organ lecture and concert.

Sentinel: Dr. Choi, what has been your inspiration in organizing the Bach Festival of Charleston?

Dr. Choi: We believe music is a wonderful way to reach out to the Charleston community, introducing them to First Scots in this unique fashion. While Spoleto and Piccolo Spoleto provide the festival experience late each spring, we thought a music festival in the bleak mid-winter might brighten a few spirits. And with this year's Bach Festival in early March, we might even be harbingers of spring.

Sentinel: Why a Johann Sebastian Bach Festival?

Dr. Choi: To an organist, Bach's works are like a bible; and that's certainly true for me. Of course J.S. Bach has tremendous appeal to the general public as he is often viewed as the "father of church music."

Bach is the great master of the German Baroque, and brought this musical era to its highest point in almost every genre of music. While building on the foundation laid by the North German School, Bach developed a unique musical style absorbing the styles of other composers and countries such as Italy and France.

While Bach's music has great appeal, note that this year's Festival includes music by several other baroque composers as well as a late German romantic composer he heavily influenced, Sigfrid Karg-Elert. We don't intend to put boundaries around the Festival, and therefore, don't be surprised if we include music by composers Bach influenced in future Festivals.

Sentinel: Ricard, it's obvious to many that you have a real affinity for baroque music, how did that affinity evolve?

Ricard Bordas: In my native Barcelona I sang in choirs from the age of 7, and my parents often took me to symphonic and choral concerts. Singing Bach or going to listen to a concert where Bach was the feature composer was and still is common place in Barcelona. I was fortunate enough to be constantly exposed to baroque music, and I developed a fascination for it. In my high school years I would go home and listen back to back the Monteverdi vespers or a Bach Cantata followed by a Queen or a Supertramp LP. I loved singing Bach or Monteverdi and very soon, after listening to countertenor Paul Esswood, I also started singing as a countertenor. Later he would be one of my

teachers at the Royal Academy in London. Since then I have been fortunate enough to sing or conduct with some of the best specialists in the field, some of the best known baroque oratorios, operas and chamber repertoire.

Sentinel: Professor Engels, do we understand correctly that you have a family connection here in the lowcountry?

Stefan Engels: Indeed I do; my in-laws have lived in the area for some time and my wife and I were married here in 1999. We've visited the Charleston area so often over the years that it has become almost a second home for us. While I continue to teach in Leipzig at the University of Music and Theater, I'm currently living here in Charleston with my wife and three daughters between my teaching periods.

Sentinel: With your Leipzig and Charleston connections, you must be looking forward to performing in a Bach Festival in your second home town?

Stefan Engels: I am, and I very much appreciate JeeYoon's enormous efforts to further establish the Bach Festival in Charleston. Especially since I now teach in *THE* Bach-Town Leipzig, I very much support her undertaking because many important musical cities around the world have Bach Festivals, and Charleston is indeed a great musical and cultural city in general.

In addition to my enthusiasm for Bach, I am currently focusing on the organ music of the late German romantic composer Sigfrid Karg-Elert, who was greatly influenced by Bach. In fact, I'm in the process of recording his entire organ works as a world premiere recording project resulting in approximately 15 CDs. Karg-Elert was also a Leipzig composer, like Bach, and thus my concert and lecture at the Festival will focus on the influence and inspiration Bach had on Karg-Elert. Also I will discuss the so-called Leipzig Organ Tradition, a tradition that started in the early 19th century, representing the areas of organ performance, organ composition and organ pedagogy. The tradition is also represented by the various musical institutions in Leipzig, such as the University of Music and Theatre, St. Thomas Church, St. Nikolai Church, and the Gewandhaus.

Sentinel: JeeYoon, we see you're conducting several Bach orchestral pieces on March 6th; you're going to be a busy lady.

Dr. Choi: I'm very happy to have this opportunity at this year's festival. Busy I am, and I'll share with you that I'll be spending at least as much time on my harpsichord preparation for the chamber concert on March 4th as I will on my conducting duties for the 6th. We're all getting very excited, and looking forward to an entertaining Festival.